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ABSTRACT

This report presents the evaluation results gathered from a 2-year study of a drug prevention program involving a consortia of nine colleges and universities located in Alabama and Florida. The consortia effort was intended to: (1) strengthen their respective drug prevention activities; (2) develop policies governing alcohol and drugs; (3) implement institution-wide drug education and prevention programs; and (4) establish a network of prevention specialists on each campus with plans for continuity. Although many of the goals were achieved, formal institutionalization of the consortia remains doubtful, and cessation of federal funding has caused organizational leadership to become questionable. Several of the consortia institutions have demonstrated significant staff reassignments and turnover during the grant period. While a support network of contacts has been provided to the consortia members, the lack of consistent support and commitment makes it unlikely that staff will be able to firmly establish strong consortia leadership. (GLR)

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Condoning Drug Education Programs at Colleges and Universities

by

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ABSTRACT:

This report presents the evaluation results gathered from a two-year study of a drug prevention program. Through the support of a federal grant, a consortia of nine (9) colleges and universities joined in an effort to strengthen their respective drug prevention activities. The grant program was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

Grant activities primarily focused on eight local meetings and two large workshops for the consortia members. The individual meetings offered an opportunity to meet the specific needs of the consortia members. Each of the day-long workshops were intended to inform the members of additional resources and enhance the support network of the consortia.

It was the intent of the consortia members to develop policies governing alcohol and drugs, implement institution-wide drug education and prevention programs, and establish a network of prevention specialists on each campus with plans for continuity. Each of the members did establish or enhance policies and procedures at their respective institutions.

Although many of the goals were achieved, formal institutionalization of the consortia remains doubtful. With the discontinuation of FIPSE funding, organizational leadership remains up in the air. Several of the consortia institutions have demonstrated significant alcohol and other drug (AOD) staff reassignments and turnover during the grant period. A support network of contacts has been provided to the consortia members. However, due to the lack of consistent support and commitment, it appears unlikely that AOD staff will be able to firmly establish strong consortia leadership.

PROJECT DESIGN:

Grant project activities involved the establishment of consortia membership and delivery of support services during a two (2) year award period. Initially, seven regional colleges and universities were contacted and surveyed for drug education and prevention activities. Of this group, six joined the first year consortia. A seventh institution which was not part of the survey, Faulkner State College, also joined during the first year. Following a delay of second year activities, it was necessary to re-establish consortia membership. This was conducted during the Spring of 1992. Second year membership changed with the loss of three of the original seven institutions. These three were:

Faulkner State College
Troy State University
Bishop State College

However, an additional five institutions joined (*) as second year members. The participating higher education institutions which completed the project include:

Pensacola Junior College
University of West Florida
University of South Alabama
Okaloosa-Walton Community College
Chipola Junior College *
Gulf Coast Community College *
Florida A & M University *
Tallahassee Community College *
Florida State University *

A total of eight local meetings were conducted for the consortia members during the second year of the grant. In addition, two workshops were presented. The consortia members sought to develop policies governing alcohol and drugs, implement institution-wide drug education and prevention programs, and establish a network of prevention specialists on each campus with plans for continuity.

All nine of the consortia member institutions entered into the process with limited AOD policies. These original policies tended to be nothing more than broad general statements. During the time period of the grant, federal mandates required policies to be clearly re-written with distinctions drawn between degrees of violations. For example, possession, use, sales and distribution of drugs required different levels of institutional response. All of the institutions were able to develop more comprehensive policies from these pre-existing policies. Project staff provided ongoing assistance to consortia members throughout this process.

ASSESSMENT / EVALUATION:

Assessment of grant activities was conducted on a formative basis by the consortia members, project staff and consultants. This process tended to be fairly informal, relying on verbal feedback and written responses on workshop evaluation forms. As a result, the data was of immediate but limited usefulness. The project staff were able to make adjustments to the grant delivery and identify activities which required supplemental information.

A more comprehensive evaluation of this FIPSE Higher Education Consortia grant was conducted separately from the assessment process. Initially, the project objectives were to be evaluated internally by project staff. Due to delays in implementation, the evaluation was re-assigned and broadened to include compilation of a project final report. Determination of success for the project was based upon the following milestones:

- Collaboration of colleges and communities in implementing drug prevention activities.
- Review and revision of drug policies.
- Establishment of office or designation of person and place to develop and assist each institution with drug prevention and education activities.
- Degree to which each consortia member has institutionalized the concepts, program, and activities.
- Achievement of a campus environment that supports moderation and responsible behavior by students.
- A decline in student-reported drug usage.
- Demonstration of the development of a core of professionals to continue campus and community activities after grant expires.

Implementation delays also resulted in minimal collection of pre-measurement data for a few of the secondary objectives of the project. Success criteria based upon campus environment improvements and reported declines in drug usage therefore lacked a clearly defined framework. Although useful in securing federal funding, criteria such as this only complicated the evaluation and research functions for the primary objectives.

Evaluation of the project was conducted separate from assessment activities and grant proposal criteria. Interviews with the consortia members and observations of AOD program activities provided sources of evaluation data. Data sources included evaluation of training activities, interviews with the consortia members, and reviews of institutional polices and procedures. In addition, descriptive vignettes provide a close look at those activities attempted and accomplished by the consortia members. The analysis of data revealed an interesting finding which the other methods of measurement did not disclose.

FINDINGS:

Findings from the data indicate that the project achieved several of the original proposal indicators of success. From the qualitative perspective however, a much larger issue emerged. The intent of the federal funding through FIPSE was to support institutionalization of drug prevention programs in institutions of higher education. Continuation of local efforts beyond the life of the federal funding is strongly desired. Unfortunately, top level administrative support tended to respond only as far as required by law. In addition, AOD staff experienced barriers such as high staff turnover, program funding cuts and reassignment to other duties and responsibilities.

This conflict of organizational agendas created a difficult environment for AOD staff to fully commit to the goals of the program. One of the programs referred to this lack of institutional support as learning to play the game.

> *The institution here treats our drug program with benign neglect. There is genuine support by the dean and others in mid management of the college. However, top administration and the personnel office only show interest during times of crisis. If a major drug bust occurs on campus then I am expected to step forward and assure the media that something is being done to take care of the problem.*

Clearly, AOD staff are frustrated with a lack of consistent effort. Occasional activities such as "doing punch and cookies on the lawn with the President" or "tieing ribbons prior to spring break" fail to address long term solutions to the problems which AOD staff consider critical.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS:

This paper demonstrates the pluralism found between a federally sponsored grant program evaluation and an educational qualitative research study. The grant program was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). It is the intent of FIPSE to support "...geographical groupings of institutions of higher education to develop, implement, operate, and improve their institution-wide comprehensive drug prevention programs." (FIPSE RFP June, 1989) An evaluation component is included with each grant award to provide both positive and negative feedback on activities attempted and accomplished. It is the intent of this process to learn what makes programs successful.

In contrast, the qualitative research study component was more attuned to understanding what was going on during the project. Attention was not specifically given to the success or failure of a given activity. Rather, an exploration of the patterns and threads of activity within and among the consortia was emphasized.

One possible conclusion from this contrast is that conflicting agendas exist. Many successful drug education and prevention programs are in place. In practice however, awareness programs may be condoned in order to make a point and then encouraged to quietly dissolve into the woodwork. As if to say that a social obligation has been met, now move along before somebody thinks we have a drug problem on our campus.

By and large, the university consortia members addressed the issue of alcohol and other drug problems from a more inclusive framework. Residential services for students imply a greater level of responsibility and accountability. Whereas, the community and junior colleges must deal with the limited interventions associated with a commuter population of students. Due to this distinction, strategies and organizational support assume different forms in the respective institutions.

Assessment efforts revealed the immediate need to provide specific assistance and support to the consortia members. However, some creativity was required to address these needs within the limited resources of the FIPSE grant. Being all things to all organizations would not work. A common response to various needs was information on alternative funding opportunities to support campus activities. Also, information regarding AIDS policies was requested by several of the members and was provided.

The larger issue of focusing greater attention to alcohol and other drug problems however remains unknown. We still don't know the answer to making these issues a greater priority within the consortia institutions in this project. Individual meetings were found to be highly effective at addressing the diverse needs of the consortia. Unfortunately, large workshops tended to have limited value due to the narrow makeup of the participants. Those in attendance already recognized the problems and were committed to seeking solutions. This is more commonly referred to as, preaching to the choir. Some value however, was gained through a strengthening of the support network.

As higher education institutions strive to become more responsive to change, the implications of these social problems must be more fully understood.